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THE ENDEARING RELATIONS OF LIFE
TEMPORARY.

A

SERMON

DELIVERED AT

BRIMFIELD, MASS. FEBRUARY 9, 1829,

AT THE INTERMENT OF

MRS. ANNE KIRTLAND VAILL,

WIFE OF THE REV. JOSEPH VAILL, JR.

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN THAT PLACE.

BY ALFRED ELY,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN MONSON, MASS.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

SPRINGFIELD:

A. G. TANNATT, PRINTER.
1829.

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SERMON.

GENESIS LVIII. 7.

AND AS FOR ME WHEN I CAME FROM PADAN, RACHEL DIED BY
ME IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, IN THE WAY, WHEN YET
THERE WAS BUT A LITTLE WAY UNTO EPHRATH;
THE SAME IS BETHLEHEM.

ALTHOUGH Jacob had now come near the close of his pilgrimage, and was wasting away under the disease which terminated his earthly career, his thoughts still lingered around the grave of his beloved Rachel, and he would point out to his son Joseph the place where she lay. Although filled with the spirit and animated with the strong and vigorous hope of life and immortality; although time and changes had carried him far beyond the period, and away from the place of her departure, yet he could not proceed to pronounce his dying and prophetic benedictions upon his children, without a most tender and affecting reference to that mournful event. So deep was the wound inflicted upon his heart, and so salutary, perhaps, in its moral influence upon his character, that it seemed to retain, in his recollection, the

freshness of yesterday. But we are not to suppose, although he carried with him to the grave a lively impression of this painful bereavement, that he indulged a murmuring thought, or was in the least degree deficient, in submission to the will of his Heavenly Father. Such a supposition would be contrary to the whole current of those devout and heavenly affections, which he breathes forth, in the chapter of my text and in that which follows.

We may recollect and express, for our own benefit and that of others, those distressing events of providence, which have pierced our souls with anguish, consistently with a peaceful and holy resignation to the will of him 'who does all things well.' It is surely no part of vital religion, to forget those dark scenes of sorrow, through which God has been pleased to lead us, or the anguish we have experienced, in the disruption of those social ties which were entwined about our hearts. The christian cannot forget them. He will frequently recall them to mind, not for the sake of awakening his grief, and of indulging the complaints of an unhumbléd spirit, but to review the solemn lessons they teach and the warnings they give, respecting the vanity of the world, and his own mortality and duty.

I have chosen the mournful recollections of the dying patriarch, which are recorded in the

text, to lead your minds to some profitable reflections, on the painful bereavement, which has deprived your Pastor of a beloved wife, his children of a faithful mother, and you of one; whom you regarded with esteem and affection.

I. I remark, the tender connexions, which we form and hold in life, are temporary. These connexions are those of habit and affection, and subsist among the members of our respective families. They arise from our social nature and dependent state, are more or less intimate and endearing, according to their relative importance, and are the immediate source of all our domestic and social comforts. They were appointed by him who "formed and fashioned us," not only that we might cheerfully aid one another along the rugged path of life, but that we might be fellow helpers to the kingdom of God. The goodness of God in this appointment is most strikingly manifest. How greatly are our sorrows relieved and our enjoyments increased, by the mingled affections, and sympathies, and attentions of that intercourse, which we hold with our near and beloved friends! But these connexions, however endearing and tender, are temporary. They exist only for a time, and then are dissolved forever. Death enters our domestic circle and cuts in sunder the ties of social affection;—

"Our friends, beloved in happier days,
The dear companions of our ways,
Descend around us to the tomb."

The existence and endearments of the marriage relation, and those which flow from it, are momentary. Though highly important and conducive to social happiness, death soon lays his hand upon them, and they are dissolved. The husband weeps over the lifeless remains of his once loved wife, and with anguish beholds her consigned to the grave. Jacob must bury his Rachel. The endearing connexion is broken forever. The wife, too, is often called to lay her bosom friend, her guide and head in the dust. Parents, with anxious hope, watch the couch of their dying child, and follow, with bleeding hearts, the slow moving corse to its place of sepulchre. Families are often broken up and scattered by death. None of the social relations, which administer so much to our comfort, continue forever; because our "life is a vapor, which appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away."

The temporary nature of these connexions is almost daily made evident to our senses, and the painful experience of some of us has written the affecting truth, deeply, upon our inmost souls. We find our thoughts, involuntarily, hovering around the grave of our deceased friends, and recollection overwhelming us for a moment, with a view of the endearments of that connexion which is now broken forever. In such circumstances, how precious the reflection, that we shall meet again in glory, if we

have good evidence, that we are mutually so united to Christ, that we shall reign with him forever and ever. Over *this union* death hath no power. This enemy, whom we so much dread, will bring all, who sustain it, to the full and everlasting possession of immortal happiness and joy. Together shall they dwell in the heavenly temple, and enjoy, in the highest and most perfect degree, all the blessings of a holy and spiritual intercourse and worship forever.

II. The dissolution of the social relations is distressing, in proportion to their nearness, or the strength of the tie of affection which is broken. The death of a friend, with whom we have had but little intercourse, or that of a neighbour, to whom we are not particularly connected, does not affect us so much as the death of a near relative. Nor does the departure of a relative, not of our own family, enter so deeply into our hearts, as the exit of one of our beloved children. In this case, parental affection, the tender sensibilities of nature towards our beloved offspring are concerned. The vigorous limb is torn from the tree. The wound will bleed and not soon be healed. But the death of a dear child, does not pierce the soul so sensibly, and open, so fully, the fountains of sorrow, as the disruption of the ties which unite husband and wife, when cemented by that pure affection, whence spring their best

joys and comforts. Here the heart is torn open, the object of its confidence, the partner of its joys, and sorrows, and hopes, is removed. The tree is cleft in twain. A part is fallen and withered; the remainder stands trembling in the wind.

The dissolution of the nearest relative connexion is not, indeed, equally distressing, in all cases. Circumstances may alleviate the sorrow; affection may be wanting; insensibility and worldly hopes, or dissatisfaction and unhappiness may have hardened the feelings. But the stronger the union of affection, the more painful its disruption. The christian, however, will be careful, that he have no idolatrous attachment to the creature: and when his friends are removed by death, he will seek consolation in God. But his religion will not teach him apathy and insensibility under bereavement, nor forbid him to feel the pang of nature, and to weep out the anguish of his heart. While he bows in humble submission, and says; "thy will be done," nature may groan with distress, and discover that he feels the rod. Religion does not render callous the social affections; it refines and regulates them, and renders them more tender and sensible. It lessens not the pain of tearing in sunder that union which is cemented by them; it only affords healing balm to the wound, and gives that consolation and support, which are neces-

sary to bear it with patience and to the glory of God. Yes, real piety increases rather than diminishes the tender sensibilities of our nature : and while it makes us more alive to the feelings of distress, when our dearest friends are laid in the grave, it opens the only source of satisfying comfort and will enable every one, who possess it, ‘not to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when he is rebuked of him.’ It was this, which sustained the Patriarch, when the chief object of his love upon earth was removed. In God did he ever find abundant consolation, while he retained till death, a vivid recollection of the anguish and distress of that parting scene. He was afflicted and sorrowed as a man, but endured and fainted not as a christian. The greater the distress, therefore, which we feel, when the strongest ties of conjugal affection are broken forever, the more affectingly and powerfully are we urged to withdraw our hopes from the creature, and seek our whole happiness in God.

III. The death of a wife and a mother is a great calamity to a family, in all cases. It is especially so, if she have left small children, and was peculiarly fitted to guide and instruct them, or in other respects sustained an excellent character. No one can, completely, fill the place of a mother. It cannot be expected that another person will have that same warm affection for the children, which will induce

equal patience and assiduity, in fulfilling those numberless and nameless attentions, kindnesses, and duties towards them, in which a kind mother delights. No one else, in her station, can feel the same intense interest and concern in their happiness, and in the welfare and prosperity of the family. Besides, from a faithful and affectionate mother do children receive their first impressions. Their habits and character take their direction from her influence, and the first seeds of knowledge and virtue are sown by her hand. When therefore, she is taken away by death, it is a calamity to the family, which cannot be easily repaired. If she was a child of God, and bore her family on her heart at the throne of grace, and laboured, with *untired* application, not only for the present comfort, but for the salvation of her children, the calamity is much increased. ‘The price of such a wife and mother is, indeed, above rubies.’ When she is removed, how wide the breach, which is made in the family!—How irreparable the loss, which is sustained! Many of the duties, which she fulfilled, now devolve upon the husband. But his calling must occupy his attention, and take him away, much of the time, from the bosom of his family, so that he cannot give that unremitting application to the instruction, and forming the minds and manners of his children, which is needful to their improvement in knowledge and virtue.

No one can know the affliction of burying a religious, prudent and faithful wife and mother, who never possessed, nor ever was deprived of the blessing. Such mothers, then, should be valued. They should realize the importance of their station, and be diligent in their duty, knowing that ‘the time is short.’ Their children should regard them with affection and submission, and rise up and call them blessed. But the useful mother and the beloved wife must descend to the tomb. “The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

IV. The disruption of the marriage relation, in such circumstances, by the death of such a wife, is peculiarly afflictive to the husband. The union is more intimate than any other, which exists among us in a social state. This is the representation given of it, by the spirit of God. Those in this relation are said to be, “no more twain but one flesh.” That spiritual union, between Christ and his people, which he calls, ‘being one with him, as he is one with the Father,’ is represented by that which subsists between husband and wife. This connexion consists in a union of interest, of object, of desire, of judgment, and of feeling and affection;—a union in every thing, which can contribute to each others happiness and usefulness, and to the peace, good order, and prosperity of the family. And when real piety

adds its sanctions and blesses the union, it becomes still more intimate and endearing. The disruption of such ties, therefore, especially when they have been strengthened by habit and by numberless kindnesses and sympathies, must be exceedingly painful. In this case, it seems to the survivor, that something necessary to his existence and well-being in the world is taken away. He experiences an indelible loneliness of feeling, which the kind attention of surrounding friends cannot remove. His heart and his house seem to be emptied of all that can give him any social enjoyment. His pleasures are lessened and the burden of his sorrows increased, for she who shared in them is gone.—When the recollection of what she was to him and his family, comes over his mind, or when he meets with some visible token of her love, or some fruit of her presence and labour, he is for a moment overwhelmed with distress. And his distress is increased, when he looks upon his motherless children, and remembers, that she who nourished and guided them, and whose counsel and kindness they need, is no more.

In these circumstances it becomes him to reflect upon the mercies, which a kind providence mingles with his affliction, and which still remain for his enjoyment, and to repair to the throne of grace, and cast his cares upon Him, who hath said; “Call upon me, in the

day of trouble, and I will answer thee and thou shalt glorify me."

We have assembled, my friends, to day, to do what our sympathies and prayers can do, to alleviate the affliction of a husband in the circumstances just stated, and to weep over the calamity of a family made desolate by the death of a pious, and prudent wife and mother. For their benefit and our own, we will exhibit, not an unrestricted eulogy upon her life, but some facts in relation to her character, to the praise of redeeming grace.

Mrs. Anne Kirtland Vaill was the daughter of Mr. Ambrose and Mrs. Mabel Kirtland. She was born at Saybrook, Conn. April 7th, 1793. She was the only daughter of her mother. Her parents were professors of religion, and early dedicated her to God in baptism. From childhood, she had the benefit of pious instruction and example, and was naturally sedate and considerate ; but it is not known that she was the subject of any deep religious impressions, until the year 1808, when she hopefully experienced renewing grace, under the ministry of the Rev. Joseph Vaill, pastor of the church in Hadlyme, and father of her husband. To this place her parents had removed a few years previous. At the age of 16, in the midst of youth, and when surrounded by all the worldly attractions, which promise pleasure and delight in this forming season, she publicly pro-

fessed Christ and united with that church. From notices, which she has left of her exercises at this period, it seems to have been a time of deep heart searchings and of earnest prayer. Not from a momentary excitement, nor from the effects of a transient impulse of feeling, was she induced thus openly to join the communion of saints, but from a deep conviction of duty, resulting from a careful examination of herself and the word of God. From this period, it appears that she lived, a long time, in the high exercise of religious feeling, comfort and hope, and increased, in no small degree, in holiness and grace.

She was married to the Rev. Mr. Vaill on the 7th of December, 1813, and came to reside in this place, the latter part of the February following. As a *wife*, she was affectionate and faithful, and particularly attentive to the welfare and usefulness of her husband. 'His heart could safely trust in her,' and was often cheered by her counsel and prayers, in the arduous and responsible duties of his station. As a *mother*, she exhibited a bright example of christian patience; and while she evinced much judgment and discretion in managing her children, she discovered a deep concern for their spiritual welfare. That they might be trained up for God, and made useful in the church was her leading desire, and the guide of her labors in relation to them.

In her *important station*, as a minister's wife, you will bear me witness, that she appeared with that propriety and dignity which adorned it, and which evidently resulted from religious principle. She was *prudent*, giving no occasion of offence, and yet, in all circumstances, decided in relation to truth and duty. She was discreet, not subjecting herself, her religion, or her standing, through want of judgment or excess of feeling, to the severe or light remarks of the unthinking or the captious. When she spoke in the cause of religion, it was seconded by example, and by the time and circumstances, and left its impression. In her *intercourse* with the people, her manner was conciliating, without trifling, calculated to inspire confidence and secure esteem. That she felt a deep concern for the highest good of this people, we have often heard her express; and they, doubtless, have more often discovered, when she entered their families and appeared in their social meetings. She seemed, indeed, to have the spirit of her station, and to enter with a lively interest, into all its duties, and all the plans and labors to do good which belong to it.

As to her *religious character*, in general, a regard to the glory of God, to her duty as a christian, and to the good of others, seemed to form the governing motive by which she was influenced, in the relations and stations which

she held. Possessed of a sound understanding, she had clear views of the plan of salvation, and the doctrines of grace were the objects of her warmest affection and the ground of her hope. Her views of christian experience were discriminating, and discovered an intimate acquaintance with the scriptures on this subject, and with the workings of the human heart. She was remarkable for *decision* of religious character. She made no compromise with what she deemed to be error and sin. While they awakened her zeal for God and her christian compassion, they met in her conduct and conversation the most decided reproof.

Her religion also was *uniform*. She exhibited an example of perseverance in well-doing. Not sometimes engaged and sometimes indifferent. 'The rising light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day,' is the emblem which fitly represents her course. The house, and worship, and ordinances of God were her delight; and she conversed like one familiar with the duties of the closet. She took a lively interest in the benevolent efforts of the present day and rejoiced in the success of Christ's cause.

In times of revival, which a merciful God has caused to pass over this people, her heart was truly engaged in the work, and she was an helpmeet indeed to her husband. Her knowledge and experience rendered her capable of an-

swering the all important inquiry, What must I do to be saved? which, at those times, came from multitudes, and also to give suitable advice to christians. Thus devoted, as she seemed to be, to the service of her Lord, and tried, as her faith often was, by severe affliction, we should not suppose, that she would be surprised and terrified at death. When, therefore, death came, by a sudden, short, and distressing sickness, the heavenly peace, calmness, and serenity of soul, which she discovered, in the intervals of delirium, plainly showed, that she was one of those happy servants who are found watching, when their Lord comes. With the most entire submission to God and willingness to depart; and with great solemnity and elevation of religious feeling and hope, she gave a parting, and very appropriate address to her deeply affected husband, and then to her weeping children, and fell asleep in Jesus.

We may dry our tears, and look after her as gone to a better world. "Blessed are the dead, that die in the Lord, from henceforth; yea, saith the spirit, they rest from their labors and their works do follow them."

But the disruption of ties so tender, endearing, and important, as she held in life, cannot but rend the hearts of her surviving friends; and none will feel the pain of a deeper wound than her desolate husband. But, my dear brother, there are many considerations which

should calm your feelings and give you consolation. That she sustained such an estimable character, was so useful in her station, and so helpful to you in your calling, should awaken your grateful praise to the God of all grace. That she was preserved to you so long, and not taken in circumstances still more distressing, and that your eye can rest upon her course with so much satisfaction, should contribute to assuage your grief. 'That she did you good and not evil all the days of her life,' that her prayers and alms are left us as a memorial of her, which may be followed with rich blessings upon you and your children, you must regard as a source of comfort. But these considerations, though worthy of attention, cannot, we know, give you the consolation you need. Consider her, then, as having gotten the victory through the blood of the Lamb. Her conflicts with sin and temptation are ended, her trials are over, her warfare is accomplished, she rests with the redeemed in glory. Should you not be comforted? The separation is short; the time of reunion, amidst the blessedness of heaven, is near.

But *God has done it*. The time and circumstances were ordered by him, who is wise in counsel and excellent in working. He is no less good and gracious in this, than in the most prosperous events of your life. "Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his

saints." It is adoring views of his goodness and grace, even in this trial, which will calm the tumult of your thoughts, and give you peace. Let your heart go forth to him in faith and prayer, and his grace shall be sufficient for you. Though your cares are increased, and your little family needs the fostering hand of a mother, you will fear no evil. Helpers will be raised up, and the presence of him "who sticketh closer than a brother," shall cheer and animate and sustain you. Let all see in you an example of quiet and peaceful submission to him, who chastiseth us for our profit. And may you become more holy and more useful, by means of this affliction.

Your dear children, too young fully to realize the loss they have sustained, we do commend to the covenant keeping God. May he spare their lives, answer the prayers of their departed mother, renew them unto holiness by his grace, lead them in the path of truth and goodness, and make them eminent blessings to his church on earth.

To the beloved sister present, and the adopted daughter, we hope God will grant his grace, both to sustain and comfort their hearts. "Follow on to know the Lord," and these afflictions shall yield to you the peaceable fruits of righteousness, the wound now made shall be healed in such a manner, that you shall be also ready, when called to follow her who has just

gone to eternity. My brethren and friends of this church and congregation; your beloved pastor needs your sympathy and your prayers, and no doubt he has both. No earthly means will contribute so much to sustain him under the weight of this trial. Let your warmer christian affections flow out towards him in his loneliness, and manifest an anxiety, not only to relieve his burdens as far as you can, but to profit by his affliction and by his instructions. Cheer his heart, by your attention and spiritual improvement, under the ministry of the word, and prepare to meet God.

With two remarks to my audience I close. And 1. You are taught the importance of faithfulness, in discharging the duties of the endearing connexions, which you hold in life. Their duration, we have seen, is short; but their consequences, as it respects their moral influence upon yourselves and families, will be lasting as eternity. In your social relations, you do, necessarily, have great influence upon each other in forming your moral character, and of course in determining your future condition. Surely, then, you ought most seriously to inquire, whether that influence is good or evil; whether you are aiding one another in the way to heaven or not.

All our social relations have their appropriate duties. These duties are of a religious character, because they are enjoined by the au-

thority of God. A faithful performance of them will exert that influence upon each other, which will tend to fit us for the kingdom of heaven. Let husbands and wives walk together as joint heirs of the grace of life. Let them have special respect to each others spiritual interests and salvation. A continual neglect here will fill the hour of separation, with anguish and bitterness of spirit, if it be not the occasion of future misery and despair. May you, who still, by the mercies of God, stand in the marriage relation, be excited to greater diligence in fulfilling the duties of it, for the time is short. The connexion may soon be dissolved. "What manner of persons, therefore, ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God."

2. You are taught, my brethren, not to suffer your dear friends to take away your hearts from God. To them should you give your benevolence and affection, but God claims and should receive your supreme love. If you give *him* your whole heart, *they* will have that place in it, which his glory and your duty require. But if your hopes are centred in them, what will you do, when they descend around you to the grave? "Trust not in man, whose breath is in his nostrils." "Let them that have wives be as though they had none;" that is, let them love God as fervently, serve him as faithfully,

fulfil every christian duty as carefully, be as watchful and zealous in working out their salvation, as though they sustained none of the tender and endearing relations of life. Let not these be a hinderance, but rather let them be a help, as they were designed to be, in our christian course. Let us be fellow helpers to the kingdom of God, and we shall not be likely to permit the endearments of social intercourse and domestic enjoyments, to take away our affections from Him, who is the author of these rich blessings, and who alone is worthy of our whole heart. Let husbands and wives, let parents and children, who must ere long be separated by death, take heed, that when they shall stand together at the tribunal of Christ, his decision upon their characters shall not separate them, unalterably, "some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."



